

September 2011

Gary's Camping Newsletter

Continuous Improvement for Great Camp Leaders

"Never mistake motion for action." – Ernest Hemingway

New Year's Resolution – If you're a camp leader, *Labor Day* is our *New Year's Day*. "This Summer" has just become "Last Summer" and we (had better) start preparing for *Next Summer*. So don't wait until January to make your resolutions. Make them NOW while the sting is still sharp from the things you WISH you'd gotten-to for summer 2011: Improved program? Cleaner facilities? Happier staff? Better communication? More appreciative camper parents? (Oops. That last one would have happened if we'd gotten to the first four!) Make a list. Share it with someone tonight. Tack it on the wall tomorrow.

Here's one to get you going: "I'll (re)start reading [Seth Godin's Blog](http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths_blog/2011/07/no-such-thing-as-business-ethics.html) every day so I keep challenging myself to try new *solutions*, and get things *started* in order to get things *done*. " -- (*Read this one and you'll see what I mean: http://sethgodin.typepad.com/seths_blog/2011/07/no-such-thing-as-business-ethics.html*).

Join Gary Live – I'll be doing keynote presentations at both upcoming events:

- Western YMCA Camp Gathering (open to all) – Oct 2-5 at Camp Surf and Camp Marston; San Diego CA -- <http://www.camp.ymca.org/westfieldconference.html>
- ACA Heart-of-the-South – Nov 1-3, Land-Between-the-Lakes, KY <http://www.acacamps.org/heartofthesouth/conference>

Ha! We've Been Going About This All Wrong – You know by now how frustrating it is for me. I couldn't figure out why so many camp web sites are so bad. Over 90% fall into the category I've labeled "Sucks." Finally, I have the answer. Camp directors design their web sites to contain the information *they* want their campers and parents to have. And they put it into the format they are most familiar with: words, and lots of them.

Of course this hasn't worked. Just look at ~~your~~ their enrollment for this summer.

If you want to avoid "sucking" you have to go at it from the opposite direction. *What do mothers want to know about your camp?* Find some moms who *haven't* sent kids to your camp (yet). THOSE are the opinions you need to seek out. They'll tell you what needs to be on your HOME PAGE and the most obvious links (answers). Here's what I heard:

http://www.garyforster.com/documents/Brochures_and_WebSites-gf.pdf

I'll bet I could graph camp enrollment as being proportional to the number of photos on their web site!

Weekend-Adventure-Passport -- Camp U-na-li-ya (WI) issues a passport to each parent/child pair and they get it stamped at each activity they attend! They give dad a motivational tool to get his son/daughter to want to visit *every* activity area. Of course once they get to each one, they don't want to leave! See photos at: <http://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=pu.156077384413835>

Eye to Eye – I’ve been pushing you to take still photos and use them to communicate. Can you give me 2 minutes for the next lesson? Here’s a simple slideshow, posted on You-tube. (These guys said “screw it” to worrying about music copyrights. The message is too important to sacrifice. Good for them).

It’s just a bunch of kids and counselors putting on a camp Olympics. But look for these things:

- The detail you can see because they’re photos, not video
- How they can focus your attention by inserting close-ups (just 2 kids out of a crowd).
- Dramatic lighting that would foil most video. (Sun from the back; under the lights at night; etc)
- The young archer with his bow. The counselor catching a fly ball in the bleachers.
- Competitions in “tent set-up” and “fire building.” (For most of its 100 year+ history this camp has held its Trip Campers in high esteem by showcasing them to the youngest campers. It still works.)
- Competitions in chess and checkers.
- Gaga/Israeli Dodgeball.
- The “hand made” quality of the award platforms (which I think is nifty as heck because it role-models to kids: “Want some fun? We don’t need to BUY fun. Let’s just MAKE fun with what we can find!” I don’t see many camps that still operate this way. If yours does, CHEIRISH it.)
- Here it is: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z-dpT6dlSdY>

(Oh... and this is the camp I spent 18 years as director; where my wife and I raised our own kids and made lifelong memories. What a great feeling that 10 years later it’s still a place of profound magic. You may recognize the location of these festivities as Camp Jewell’s “Thunderdome,” over 13,000 people have seen the video of how it was created...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YPt8AzcjBII&feature=related>) Congratulations to new Executive Director Ray Zetye! ray.zetye@ghymca.org

Sit Like an Eagle – Here’s one great kid. William Ryker Sharp. His friends call him Ryker. (His parents must be Star Trek TNG fans... how cool!) Raised the money and 24 volunteers and supervised the construction of 42 Leopold Benches; 2 for every platform tent at Phantom Lake YMCA Camp.

<http://www.livinglakecountry.com/userstoriessubmitted/128609798.html> and

<http://muskego.patch.com/articles/muskego-eagle-scout-honor-a-bittersweet-one>

And what a great family. His mom Lisa Sharp said, "Ryker has received over 50 congratulation letters in the mail as well from The President, Vice President, previous Presidents, Secretaries of State, Senators and even Mike Rowe from Dirty Jobs." (And we know how THAT happened, eh Mom? Wink-wink).

Here’s An Acorn – for my fellow blind pigs. From a study of *billions* of e-mails, this emerged:

E-mail that is *most forwarded* (likely meaning *most read*) is sent **a.)** Before people arrive at work, so that it’s on the “top” of their in-box. (This is so simple, yet so smart, I can’t believe I didn’t think of it), and

b.) E-mails sent on weekends are much more likely read than e-mails sent on Mondays, Tuesdays or Wednesdays. How much more? FIVE TIMES more likely to be read and forwarded.

Want Solar Energy? Be a Passivist. -- <http://passivehouse.us/passiveHouse/PHIUSHome.html>

Because even Bill Gate says only rich people should bother with rooftop solar panels.

http://www.wired.com/magazine/2011/06/mf_qagates/

Floating Water Lab – Here’s good description of a hard-science outdoor education activity using an inexpensive used (or borrowed) pontoon “party” boat:

<http://www.clemetparks.com/education/floatingwater.asp>

Subscription to Inspire? – I recently hosted two different strategic planning meetings. Camp alumni told stories about how their counselors had shared their personal passions, and what a lasting impact those moments had. We’re not talking about during the activity, but the time *before* and *afterwards* when they sat together and listened to their counselor’s stories, looked through their magazines, listened to their music. Maybe you can “prime” that pump by having some specialty magazines in the cabins and activity areas. Now would be a good time to subscribe so you’ll have a good stack by next summer. From Amazon.com you can get amazing (\$5!?) deals on [Horse Illustrated](#), [Backpacker](#), [Sail](#), etc.

“You cook with your eyes, mouth and head” – That’s one of the “key concept statements” that Chef Charlie repeats in his cooking classes at the [Maine Arts Camp](#). By the third day, kids say it *with* him, as he gives more examples of why it’s *true*. It’s printed on the “recipe templates” that he sends home with each camper. Here’s another: **“Mis en Place”** – French for ‘everything in place’. (Before you turn on the heat and begin cooking -- all the things you will need -- from veggies already chopped, ingredients measured, utensils, and even the colander already in the sink -- should be ready at hand.) And of course, Charlie dresses in his whites for every class. *“They come to eat... but they leave as cooks!”*

Does It Work? – “First, I want to thank you for being a great resource to the camp community. My wife and I attended the Marketing Symposium last year and did our best to put most of your practices in place this year. I can happily tell you that our camp enrollment grew by 15%, our retention was 58% and we are on pace to hopefully make our budget. More importantly our campers were happy and are already talking about returning next year. Our 2012 preregistrations are up 35% from last year. So your strategies have worked for us. We really did not go after new market share, we simply asked our current camp lovers to work for us to get the new business.” -- *Scott Weigley, Camp Tippecanoe, OH*

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“Goals are worthless if you can’t fail to achieve them.” – Dan Zarrella

“Necessity is the mother of invention.” – Plato (Greek camp director)

“Time will heal a broken heart; just like time will heal his broken arms and legs.” – Miss Piggy

Let’s celebrate the people in our lives “Last Summer.” The memories we’ve created will be our longest-lasting legacy. Happy New Year!

Gary

Gary Forster, LLC

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